
ANNUAL REPORTS

OF THE

BOSTON FEMALE ASYLUM,

FOR

1841 and 1842.

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PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETINGS

OF

1841 AND 1842.



BOSTON:
PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN, 24 CONGRESS ST.
1842.

ANNUAL REPORT.

1841.

OUR Records for the past year furnish but few materials for a Report. The establishment has gone on in its usual course of good order and prosperity. The health of the children has been uniformly good, excepting when the measles prevailed among them, and thirty-nine were at one time sick with this disease. The fact that all very soon recovered entirely from its effects, speaks for itself in favor of the care they received, and the good influence of their wholesome and regular manner of living.

Extensive repairs on the house were needed, and have been made at considerable expense.

It was determined by a vote passed in January, 1839, that the proceeds of the work done by the children, including the annual sale, should be placed in the Savings Bank, as a fund for the relief of any former beneficiaries of this charity, who from sickness or misfortune should be found to need assistance, and whose conduct should deserve it. Ten dollars from this fund have been given to a sick and needy, but worthy applicant.

Four of the girls who had been bound out, completed their term of apprenticeship during the year 1840. Of three of these we have had accounts that they served the

time acceptably in the families where they were placed, and that their characters and prospects were good. Of one who was placed with a sister, we could obtain no information; probably they had left this part of the country.

Since the last Anniversary, eleven girls have been placed in families, and only three admitted. When we consider the constant applications of the poor for assistance, and the great advantages offered in this Institution for the comfort and instruction of their children, it may well excite surprise that so few have lately claimed the benefit of its charity.

Looking back on the records of the last four years, it appears that from September, 1837, to 1838, twelve were admitted; from 1838 to 1839, eleven; from 1839 to 1840, eight; from 1840 to 1841, but three.

There has been then for the last four years a constant diminution in the number of children offered; and this notwithstanding a rapidly increasing population, among which is a full proportion of the poor. This fact seems to demand from the friends of the Institution and of the poor an inquiry into its causes. It may be said that the distresses of poverty are so much alleviated by other charitable societies, and by the operations of the ministry at large, that the aid of ours is less needed. All the good thus done, we would acknowledge, and be thankful for; but it is believed that the experience of every one who is in the habit of attending to the applications of the poor, will testify that these reasons cannot sufficiently account for the fact, while calls for assistance are still so abounding and so constant.

One cause which has operated on a large and needy portion of our community, has doubtless been the increased sectarian spirit which has led the guides of those pro-

fessing the Roman Catholic faith to discountenance or forbid the placing of children belonging to them in this Asylum. When the good Bishop Cheverus advised and encouraged the destitute of his flock to put their suffering children here, where they could be well fed, and clothed, and instructed, and cared for, we had many of this class. But as it is many years since this change has taken place, it should not be considered as affecting the comparative results of the last four.

Perhaps the principal causes why the poor are not more ready to avail themselves of the advantages offered by the Asylum, may be found in some changes of the state of society among us, which render them every year more and more unwilling to give up the control of female children until they are eighteen years old. The subject is important, and may claim to be considered at large.

In the establishment of this charity, several distinct objects were proposed. The relief of widows or others burthened with children they were unable to support—the present comfort and instruction of the children—and their permanent advantage, in being placed, when they left the Asylum, in such situations as would qualify them to obtain sufficient and respectable provision for themselves at the expiration of their minority. Nor was it forgotten that good might be returned to society for the good bestowed, in the number of well taught girls who might be expected to fill with propriety a station, the importance of which is felt by all, and which if properly considered, implies nothing derogatory to any.

There is no cause to complain that all these objects have not in a good degree been accomplished; we have cause to rejoice that so much has been done. But it cannot be denied that the most difficult and often most painful duties of the Managers in regard to the children,

occur after they are placed in families. Not that this is by any means the case in general. On the contrary, our records will show, that instances of mutual satisfaction—of good treatment on the one side and good conduct on the other—greatly preponderate. Yet cases of an opposite nature are often presented, and it is feared under the present arrangement are not likely to become less frequent. At the time the regulations in regard to binding out the children were adopted, it was very much the custom for the mistress of a family to take from poor though often respectable parents a young girl to clothe and instruct till she should be eighteen years old, in return for her services till that time. Sometimes this was done by indenture, but oftener by simple verbal agreement; and from such agreements, faithfully observed, have arisen many connections productive of mutual advantages, which have lasted through life. Our mode of binding the children was then in perfect accordance with prevailing customs. But it is believed that few agreements of this kind are now made, or would be long kept by the parents of a healthy capable girl. The increase of wealth and other changes in society have at the same time increased the demand for service, and in many cases removed the mistresses of families farther from that direct supervision of those who perform it, which is so especially important to the young. Now, a girl long before she is eighteen, can obtain wages which will enable her to indulge that love of dress, which is a prevailing folly, and give a feeling of that independence, the desire for which is often most strong in those who least know how properly to use it. Parents and friends are also misled by the *apparent* advantage, or by the desire of appropriating to themselves the earnings of the children; and, forgetting, or reckless of the evils of imperfect training, of

changing places, of the temptations of those who have no one interested to instruct and watch over them, are apt to think that mere food and clothing and teaching are insufficient compensation for the work for which they see others obtaining a nominally larger reward. On the other hand it may be feared, that some who apply for these children have little other thought than to obtain a selfish convenience—the most labor at the least price at which it can be procured ; that in the idea of the servant they lose sight of the child—one needing all the instruction and forbearance and encouragement and restraint which youth always requires. If disappointed in the expectation of finding an obedient and useful domestic, they too often become impatient ; and, unmindful of their obligations, throw the responsibility and the child on another ; so that at the end of her minority, the Managers hardly know where to look for her. It is very desirable that juster views of this subject should, on both sides, prevail.

The friends of the children, and the children themselves, so far as they are capable of understanding, should be taught to consider that they were in most cases taken from extreme want and exposure ; protected and instructed, and at a suitable age placed in such situations as, to the best knowledge of the Managers, are most advantageous for them ; that in the first part of their apprenticeship, their food, clothing, and instruction, are more than an equivalent for their services ; and that afterward the advantages of a permanent home, thorough instruction in domestic affairs, and the power of securing friends who may be of incalculable benefit to them through life, may well counterbalance the precarious, and often only apparent good, of having an earlier command of wages.

On the other hand, it is to be wished that they who

take these children would seriously consider the responsibility they assume. We would say to them, ' You take a *child*; you must not expect to make her, without care, and instruction, and patience, a useful domestic. Encourage what you may find good in her, and in punishing her faults, consider how you should endeavor to correct those of your own children; for is not One the Father of us all? And on no occasion should you feel authorized to throw her off from your protection, or permit her to leave it, without the consent of those by whom she was put under your care.'

Some changes in the terms of binding out our children are contemplated, which it is hoped may increase the sense of responsibility on the one side, and give additional protection and incitement to exertion with a surer recompense on the other. At some future time we hope to be able to report their beneficial operation.

ANNUAL REPORT.

1842.

Our last Annual Report was principally occupied with one subject, in reference to which some alterations in the terms on which the girls shall be bound out from the Asylum, were proposed. It may seem proper, therefore, to commence the present one by saying that these alterations have been effected, and stating in what they consist.

In addition then to the former requirements of our Indentures, it has been provided, 1st, That a written report shall be required once in each year, relative to the health, character, and well-being of the apprentice.

This condition will, it is hoped, be a security for the good treatment of the children, and at the same time, a restraint and incitement to them. It was also made necessary by the difficulty sometimes found in tracing the girls after they leave the Asylum.

2d. That the sum of Fifty Dollars shall be substituted for the clothing formerly required when the apprentice shall arrive at the age of eighteen years; to be paid to her, "unless she shall be guilty of such gross misconduct during her apprenticeship, that the Board of Managers shall be of opinion that she ought to forfeit her claim to the sum."

This alteration secures a more equal and definite recompense to those who merit it, and threatens certain loss to those who abuse their privileges or leave their places without being regularly discharged.

It has been suggested that the payment of so considerable a sum at one time, might be an inconvenience to some persons whose families might, nevertheless, be excellent places for the protection and good training of our children. It may be answered, that by laying aside from time to time during the one or two last years of their service, a sum much smaller than would pay the wages of hired domestics, the inconvenience might be avoided—that justice to the apprentice should be considered as well as the convenience of the employer; and that, after all, the sum is hardly more than the former requirement of clothing, if faithfully fulfilled, would amount to. But it has been well known, that while the letter of the obligation has been answered, as to the prescribed *quantity* of clothing, its *value* has so varied, as to make the recompense very unequal to many who have equally deserved.

The third, and last alteration is, that a penalty of One Hundred Dollars is incurred by neglect of fulfilling the conditions of the Indenture. This will be readily perceived to be a necessary guard to the Institution.

Five sets of Indenture have been executed on the new terms.

Under the continued care of the same excellent Matron and Instructress, by whose faithful discharge of their arduous duties, the establishment has been so long favored, it continues to prosper. The neatness and good order of the house and school are obvious to every visitor; but the watchful care and kindness with which the comfort and improvement of the children are attended to, can be fully appreciated only by those intimately acquainted with the management of the Asylum.

One of the little girls died suddenly in February last, of disease of the heart. But the general health has been good, and their present appearance attests to its continuance. Eighteen children have been admitted—a number greater than that of any preceding year. Nine have been bound out. Of these, two were adopted as children, in highly respectable families; three were placed with relations, who, from an improved state of their circumstances, were able to provide for them; and the other four have gone into families, where it is hoped their chance of being well taken care of and prepared for future usefulness, may be equal to that of the others.

Of the girls bound out in former years, eleven have finished their apprenticeship during the last. Four of these had been given up to near relatives, and remain with them. Three, having served their term with good characters, are learning trades. Three are earning a respectable living at service, and one, who was adopted, is reported by her excellent friends, as having been to them a “good and dutiful child; her moral character without a blemish, and she readily admitted into the best society of” the town in which they reside.

Two worthy objects have received the sum of Ten Dollars each from the Relief Fund. One of these, then very sick, is since dead, and her little orphan girl has been received into the same home that sheltered the childhood of its mother.

In the death of the venerable Dr. Harris, the Institution has lost a friend whose interest in its favor was manifested at its commencement, and continued to the close of his life. His “Anniversary Hymn,” sung by the children for so many years, is still well remembered. And in his latter days he might often have been seen joining the little procession of orphans on its way from church, and

coming in to speak to them words of religious instruction in the condescending spirit of the gospel. May these instructions not be lost upon them, nor his memory soon fade from their young hearts.

Though it has, for obvious reasons, been found expedient for several years to discontinue the public anniversary celebration, it is hoped this charity will not lose its hold on the interest and regard of the community, to which it is believed to have been in many ways a benefit; and that its now scanty list of subscribers will not further diminish. We would especially urge those who remain, not to forsake this annual assembling of themselves together. And this, not only that they may keep alive their care for the objects of the Institution, and their knowledge of its concerns; but that those in its immediate management may have the sanction of their presence, and the satisfaction of feeling that they are appointed to what they know to be a very responsible duty, by a less inconsiderable portion of the Society of which they are the agents.

Respectfully submitted, by

A. L. WALES,

Secretary.

AGREEABLY to a vote of the Managers of the Boston Female Asylum, these Reports of the last two years, are published for the use of the Members of that Institution, and others who may be interested in the subject of them. Since the Annual Meeting in September last, there have been many applications for the admission of children. Seventy are now in the Asylum—a number which requires the use of the *whole* income of the funds of the Institution.

Boston, Oct. 20, 1842.

